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In the night I thought of my dead boys;
They called me "Mother!"
I thought I was alone, and had no children.
I remembered my daughters,
But they were far away among the white people.
My children have come back.
My heart is like the young plantain-leaf,
That shoots out when the sun shines.

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DANCES.—Dancing (M.: *dans pulaya*,[42] T.: *dans pulnin;* P.: *abanini, danis pulnini;* U.: *abanaka*) is practically limited to the various festivals and had perhaps originally a religious significance. Certain rejoicings of the Miskito, at which dancing takes place, are called *li-sikra* (lit.: "black water"), and others are known by the name *plamana;* the latter are celebrated in honor of some one who is leaving for a long journey.

The women perform individual dances which do not lack a certain grace; they place the hands upon the shoulders or the head and make various contortions of the body as they walk or jump around.

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Some dances of rejoicing have been introduced by the Negroes or Creoles, and are performed chiefly around Christmas, which is considered a period of merrymaking by all these Indians, whether evangelised or not. The festivities last about two weeks. A great circle is formed with men and women alternating and joining hands or placing the right hand upon the left shoulder of their neighbor; in the center are seated one or two men beating drums, and at the rhythm the circle moves around.

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STORY-TELLING.—The telling of stories is one of the favorite ways of passing the long hours at night before going to bed. The old Miskito, who lived under the good old days of the "Mosquito Kingdom," are always glad to talk of their armed expeditions into the "Spaniard's" country (Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica), and to relate some bizarre exploits in connection with those wars. The Indians can relate an occurrence in the most animated manner, but they do not seem to invent tales or stories as do the Negroes.

When the Indian has returned from a hunting or fishing expedition he delights in giving a most detailed account of everything he noticed in the course of the day, even if nothing out of the ordinary occurred. He will give all the particulars regarding the game he saw, and relate in a most tedious manner how he succeeded in outwitting it and getting within gunshot of it. The narrator may keep on in this manner for hours, while his patient listeners occasionally interpolate an exclamation denoting their astonishment, surprise, doubt, agreement, or comprehension.

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[42] The word *dans* or *danis* is taken from the English.

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larger beasts, like the jaguar and the puma, and kills them by introducing itself into their stomach. 925

WATER TIGER.—The water tiger (M.: *li lamya;* S.: *was nawa*) is supposed to be a manateelike animal, but covered with otterlike, glossy hair and a mane. Different species are said to exist, which have the same variety of color as the various species of Felis, the black variety being, however, the most common. This beast has webbed feet and walks awkwardly on land, but it is very swift in the water. It is found chiefly in the larger rivers among the rocks, and will devour any one swimming in the neighborhood or falling into the water; domestic animals and even men are said to have occasionally fallen victim to it. The Indians claim to have shot at it, but never succeeded in killing a specimen.

GIGANTIC BOA CONSTRICTOR.—A very large waula or boa constrictor (M.: *wáhla tara;* T.: *wáhla;* U.: *wayil*) with two horns on the head like a deer [*] is said to inhabit certain large lagoons in the pine ridges, far away from the nearest Indian village. It is claimed that the common waula or boa turns into such a monster when it reaches old age, and that it then retreats into deep lagoons. Man has no power to kill such a boa constrictor, as bullets have no effect on it; it can be destroyed only by a stroke of lightning.

The creeks leading to the lagoons inhabited by the monster are generally rich in all sorts of game, for no one dares to ascend them. It is claimed that in case anyone should be foolhardy enough to paddle up such a creek, presently a rumbling of thunder is heard; then the water reverses its course, flowing at a tremendous speed back to the lagoon directly into the mouth of the boa constrictor, which swallows the canoe with the intruder. The boat-bill heron (M.: *ukaka;* S.: *awahta*), a most uncanny night bird, is said to be found at the mouth of such creeks in order to warn off intruders.

FABLES OR TALES DEALING WITH BEASTS AND BIRDS

The Miskito know a great number of tales in which animals and birds act, think, and talk like human beings; they are supposed to possess spirits and to live, eat, drink, love, hate, and die just like the Indians. 538 ● 171

These fables remind somewhat of the adventures of Ananzi—a sort of god or culture hero—of the Gold Coast; or, Turtle of the Slave Coast; or, Hare (the Brer Rabbit of the United States Negroes) among the Bantu. Heath (a: 52) has drawn attention to the re-

[*] For this reason the Ladinos call it "masacuate" (from the Mexican *mazatl* "deer" and *coatl* "serpent").

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538 171 semblance of these fables with the "anancy" or "nancy" stories[88] of Jamaica, so that one can hardly doubt a common origin, and these stories are certainly African.

The following Miskito fable has been given in the Indian tongue by Berckenhagen.[89] I submit herewith the English translation thereof under the title:

WHY THE HOWLING MONKEY NEVER DESCENDS FROM THE TREES

538 The tapir and the howling monkey went together into the forest. The tapir was foolish enough to play on a flute which he had inherited. When the howling monkey heard that he asked to buy the flute, but the tapir refused to sell the instrument, and kept on playing it. Then the howling monkey had an idea and he said to the tapir as follows: "As you are unwilling to sell the flute, just lend it to me for a moment to try it; whenever I shall have a flute I will also let you have it." Thereupon the foolish tapir handed the flute to the monkey. Immediately the latter hurried up a tree, whence he kept on blowing the flute without stopping. The tapir then wanted his property back, but the monkey paid no attention to him. Thereupon he became very angry and ran hither and thither in the water and among the spiny vegetation, but the howling monkey kept on playing the instrument. The tapir then decided to lie in wait for the howler, determined to kill him wherever he should find him on account of the flute. For fear of that the howling monkey does not dare to descend from the trees, not even in order to drink, and he quenches his thirst with the moisture from the leaves of the vegetation.

Beware of giving away your inheritance.

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[88] *Anancy* or *ananzi* is the term for spider in the Chi language of western Africa; this arachnid plays a great rôle in the larger part of the folk tales of the West coast of Africa from Cape Verde to Cameroon. The name "anancy story" is applied nowadays by the Jamaican Negroes to any legend, myth, or fairy tale which is being told at night, especially during a "wake." Our rural European populations likewise believe that a real ghost story ought to be told at night around the fireside.

[89] Grammar of the Miskito Language, by H. Berckenhagen. Bluefields, Nicaragua, 1894, p. 81.